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## Critics Corner

This page presents reviews of critical articles related to the work of Raven Grimassi along with rebuttals. Also featured is a collection of responses to various criticisms that merit a response in order to counter the intentional misrepresentations frequently fostered by Grimassi's critics.



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## A BIRD'S EYE VIEW: Rebuttals by Raven Grimassi

### WHEN IMAGINATION RUNS WILD

In a recent blog written by a gentleman named David Griffin (aka Lupercus) I note some very odd and unwarranted allegations against my character. Mr. Griffin's defamatory attacks against my name appear to stem from a post I made on the Traditional Witchcraft forum. Mr. Griffin's apparent misinterpretation of my comments seem to have resulted in what I consider to be a very bizarre rant.

While much of what he says is a reinvention of the history between us, and a misrepresentation of the facts regarding me and my tradition, I feel that I should address his blog anyway. Normally I do not like to give energy to false accusations, but it seems wise in this case to make a statement.

Mr. Griffin and I had early communications by phone and email. He reinvents the history here by claiming that I wrote to him seeking protection for my reputation and wanting him to alert me to negative comments made against me. However, the facts are I first contacted him directly because people were writing to me inquiring about the authenticity of these individuals. Before arriving at an opinion, I wanted to go to the source. So, that is what I did.

In the beginning, communications were cordial. I tried to help them deal positively with their critics, and David and his Italian guests and I agreed to keep each other informed about comments that people might make in an attempt to set us against one another. I expressed my desire to have them judged fairly by community, and I actively countered anything on the Internet in which people without first hand knowledge were saying negatively about them.

During the course of events, one of my initiates went into a private forum without my knowledge or direction, and posted a critical view of David and his Italian guests. Mr. Griffin chose to regard this as a covert operation launched by me, which of course it was not. In response, I wrote a public post on Facebook pointing out that I did not agree with my initiate's views, and did not set her out to post against anyone. At the time this seemed to satisfy Mr. Griffin's misgivings.

In an attempt to keep boundaries clear, Mr. Griffin, his Italian guests, and I agreed not to cross-pollinate (so to speak) and it was decided out of courtesy that we not teach each other's initiates and active students. However, in his recent blog, Mr. Griffin reinvents this agreement, and paints it in the light of fear on my part that my people would learn the "true teachings" he and his guests hold, which implies that mine are bogus. A clever maneuver, but an easily seen through move on his part.

Among the odd things in Mr. Griffin's blog is the reference to the Great Rite as indicator of the only true and authentic form of Italian witchcraft, and he asserts that I know nothing about it. This, of course, appears to indicate an attempt to take away my credibility as a witch practicing a form of Italian witchcraft. He also asserts that the tradition of his Italian guests, which is known as The Sublime Art, is the mark of authentic Italian witchcraft. He then asserts that it is unknown to me (by that name) and therefore what I teach is entirely made up. How sad to see this "My way is the only true way" theme reappearing in the Craft community. I remember this mentality from the 60's and early 70's. I had hoped we had all gotten over this nonsense and ego driven agenda.

For anyone actually interested in the facts, what I stated that apparently upset Mr. Griffin was a factual clarification of his position and not a condemnation. Here is what I wrote (which Griffin edited on his blog) in response to a question someone raised, asking if anyone knew something about the Stregheria del Bosco Sacro (people). This appeared on the Traditional Witchcraft forum, under the thread someone else started, which was titled **Stregheria del Bosco Sacro** -

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*"Yes, I have had several emails and phone conversations with the people in question. In the early stages of communication they claimed to be an Italian witchcraft tradition of great antiquity, which they stated continued in the Lake Nemi region of Italy. They further claimed that the priestess in their company comes from a lineage of 38 generations of priestesses at Nemi (the former sacred site of the temple of Diana).*

*The couple from Italy are staying with their sponsor David Griffin, a name associated with the Golden Dawn controversy. When I first spoke with him about the couple, David told me on the phone that the "coming of the Stregans" is going to be like when the Beatles first came to the US, and that the impact on the Pagan community will be unimaginable. However, following their debut at the Pantheacon convention, it seems like things turned out a bit differently than he envisioned. Attendance at their talks was low, and the majority of the reviews were not complimentary.*

*It is noteworthy that after Pantheacon, and the resulting questions and objections raised, David and his Italian guests are no longer referring to themselves as "Stregans" or "Italian Witches". They have changed the text on their website, removing all references to Stregheria, Italian Witchcraft, and so forth. They are now calling their tradition "the ancient Shamanic tradition of the Great Mother in Italy". The use of "Stregheria" on their site has now been replaced with Egyptian Alchemy.*

*I have more information and am happy to answer any questions related to this topic.*

*- Raven Grimassi"*

Mr. Griffin chose to regard this as an accusation that I consider the folks in question to be frauds. I did not say that, and it was not my intention to depict them as such. My intention was to demonstrate that they are no longer referring to themselves as strega/Italian witches, which is an important point and distinction that I wanted to make on a forum devoted to traditional witchcraft. Nowhere did I state these people are fake, I simply clarified their position as conveyed to me. No one on the Traditional Witchcraft forum asked me for my personal opinion about the authenticity of these people and I did not offer one.

What Mr. Griffin chooses to leave out of his rant blog, is my forum comment:

*"I also have a problem with the idea of initiating people on first meeting. I asked them about it and they replied that this is their structure and how the system functions. They inform me that after initiation the training begins, but that initiation and oath-taking is required before anything else. They have no "outer court" phase. It's alien to what I was taught by my native Italian teachers. But, to be fair, witchcraft differs in each region of Italy. There is no "one size fits all" - but even so....further questions are begged.*

*- Raven Grimassi"*

My comments were intended to convey that one tradition of Italian witchcraft cannot be compared against another in an attempt to mark authenticity. Each regional system differs. But, as clearly indicated in Mr. Griffin's blog, he apparently feels that his system is the only true one, and if differences appear in mine, then mine cannot be authentic. All of this reminds of the stage magician's trick of misdirecting the audience's attention away from what is actually taking place so as to leave the impression that what he showed is real.

In closing, I suggest that Mr. Griffin and his Italian guests should feel confident in who and what they are, and not be threatened by something they misinterpret as a debunking of them. People who are genuine have no need to be fearful. Anger, it is said, is a fear based emotion. So, Mr. Griffin and his Italian guests should embrace the courage of their convictions, and go forth with their truth. It's a much healthier approach than what appears on Griffin's blog.

Peace to all,  
Raven Grimassi

[Posted on 5/21/11]

To read David Griffin's blog, go to this URL:

<http://hermetic-golden-dawn.blogspot.com/2011/05/rebuttal-to-lewellyn-author-raven.html>

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## RESPONSE TO FALSE ALLEGATIONS ON THE INTERNET:

It seems that one of the costs of being a well-known author is to be a target for criticism and ridicule. This is only to be expected and most authors accept it as an unfortunate part of their chosen career. But what is not acceptable is the deliberate misrepresentations and falsehoods fostered by critics. Internet forums and chat rooms are an overly abundant source of misinformation and false allegations. Unfortunately many people believe what they read there without questioning or asking for proof.

Over the years a small but very vocal scattering of critics have assaulted the Internet with an abundance of misinformation, misrepresentation, and untruthful statements about me, my tradition, and my writings. The falsehoods have then been repeated and passed along on the Internet. For anyone interested in the truth I have decided to set the record straight here once and for all.

The following are the most common false accusations made on the Internet, and which appear without any attempt to substantiate them. No real evidence is brought forth, and commentators merely state they read it somewhere but that the sources have since disappeared. Unfortunately there are people who regard this hearsay as fact, and this only serves to keep falsehoods alive.

I will start with the allegation and then follow with the facts.

1. ALLEGATION: Grimassi claims in his book *Ways of the Strega* (later re-titled *Italian Witchcraft*) that he is presenting pure Italian witchcraft. But what he writes about is not practiced in Italy or know to native Italians.

FACT: In the introduction to *Ways of the Strega*, I clearly state that the system in the book is the Aridian tradition. I state that it is a modern system created by me but based upon an older Italian model. I further state that the Aridian tradition is mixed with Wiccan elements. In the new re-titled edition (*Italian Witchcraft*) I point out that the Aridian system was created by me in the early 1980s.

Since the rituals and other practices in the book are from the Aridian system (as pointed out in the book) naturally they are not native Italian rites. They are, however, based upon Italian witchcraft but mixed with modern Wicca themes. So, of course, native Italians practicing non-Wiccan related rites are not performing the rituals from my book. However there is plenty of material within my books on Italian witchcraft that reveal elements of native Italian traditions. Therefore it cannot be reasonably argued that my books *Italian Witchcraft*, and *Hereditary Witchcraft*, contain nothing about old native Italian Craft tradition. They do indeed contain old and authentic elements of Italian witchcraft.

I believe that the negative allegations are designed to mislead people into believing that I am trying to pull off a veiled deception. This is simply not the case. In my published material I present exactly what I claim to present - a modern system called the Aridian tradition, which I created (based upon Italian teachings but mixed with Wicca).

The false allegations have largely been spread on the Internet by members of an organization known as *Stregoneria Italiana*, and through the efforts of a woman known as Rue. She operates a site called Rue's Kitchen. Both sites contain material that is a hodge-podge collection of common Italian folklore and magic that is conflated with witchcraft. Unfortunately what is depicted as witchcraft on these sites isn't, and remains outside of their grasp. This is primarily due to the fact that Italian witchcraft is an initiatory system, and from the material presented on *Rue's Kitchen* and *Stregoneria Italiana*, it is obvious that the individuals involved with these sites are outsiders. However, critics of my work rely heavily upon the material contained on these websites in a failed attempt to discredit authentic elements of Italian witchcraft presented by me.

The standard operating procedure of these critics in their assault against my work and my reputation can be summed up with three words: misrepresent, distort, falsify.

2. ALLEGATION: Following the publication of Grimassi's book *Ways of the Strega* in 1994, the real strega complained to the Publisher (Llewellyn) and in response the Publisher changed the title to *Italian Witchcraft*.

FACT: The title was changed by the Publisher after sales of *Ways of the Strega* were not as expected. Llewellyn felt that the inclusion of "Strega" in the title was not clear enough to the average person as to what the book was about (the term "strega" was not as well known back in 1994). So it was decided that the book should be re-titled *Italian Witchcraft* (a title clearly indicating to anyone what the book is about).

There are several amusing things about the allegation of the "real strega" and their efforts. First, it would take a very large number of people to cause a publisher to go to the expense of re-titling a book and creating a new cover. The number would far exceed the population of Strega. Second, there is no central authority to rally the Strega to such an action, and so the claim that hordes of Strega descended upon Llewellyn is utter nonsense. And, even if anyone complained to Llewellyn, how would Llewellyn know who is "real strega" and who is not? Are we to believe that these so-called "real strega" presented Llewellyn with diplomas from *Strega University* along with their official photo ID cards and certificates of authenticity? See how ridiculous such an allegation this whole thing is? And yet there are people who believe it is true.

The earliest appearance I can find of this false allegation shows up on the Internet, being posted by a person calling himself "Brock" and by another person supporting the allegation who goes by the name "Lark" (a husband and wife team). From public information posted in their bios, and from public information appearing in websites from organizations these individuals belong to, the real names of these people appear to

be Blake and Carol Kirk. They reportedly reside in Tennessee in or around the Clarksville area (although one bio has Brock living in Atlanta, GA).

I first encountered these individuals on the old Compuserve forums sometime around 1994 (give or take a year). At that time I personally found Brock to be quite ill mannered, unreasonably challenging, and often completely wrong about the things he was posting. Lark was less abrasive, although her attacks were frequent and unwarranted. When addressed in reply, Lark seemed inappropriately defensive in her posts.

My recollection is that few people on the forums felt they were credible back in those days. This caused them quite a bit of flak. Because I was a frequent poster and earned a certain status of respect, Brock and Lark often targeted me in negative posts. I suppose they felt that if they could discredit me it would then elevate them. It is an unfortunate element of human nature.

We frequently locked horns and the two of them often came across looking pretty bad. Instead of taking any responsibility for how their own behavior in a public forum had its consequences, they apparently instead blamed me for their poor reputation among fellow members. From ongoing and recent posts, it appears that Lark and Brock never got over it, and have seemingly waged a vendetta against me and my writings for many years. This is evidenced in a statement made by Brock on the site known as Live Journal Wiccan Community.

On June 2nd, 2008 (at 2:44 pm) Brock replied to a post confronting him about the unsubstantiated allegations he made, and pointing out that such attacks on an author's reputation can harm his ability to make a living. Brock remarks:

"And I've been making these unsubstantiated allegations for more than ten years now, and it doesn't seem to have had any effect on Raven's career"

<http://community.livejournal.com/wiccan/1379737.html?view=12298649t12298649>

So here we see an admission that Brock has purposely kept up his allegations since the late 1990s. This makes it apparent that he is also the origin of the false story since it does not appear earlier by anyone other than Brock.

### 3. ALLEGATION: Grimassi never received any initiations in any tradition.

FACT: Actually my first Wiccan initiation was in 1970 into a tradition claiming to be Gardnerian. While the lineage claims later proved to be false, the system itself was common place Wicca. I was initiated into this system by a woman named Lady Heather, in the San Diego area. I consider the material she taught to be sound and valuable. It is only the false claim of lineage to Gardner that has tainted the experience.

In 1974 I was initiated into a system called Brittish Wicca by a couple named Phil and Joanne Wayne (or was it Wade?) who lived in the San Diego area. They claimed to practice an old tradition that was a blend of Basque and British witchcraft. Later in 1983, I was initiated into the Pictish-Gaelic tradition of Wicca by a man in San Diego named Mel Fuller (verifiable by the Elder of that tradition, a person named Marilee Bigalow who lives in the San Francisco Bay area. I was also initiated into the Traditionalist Celtic tradition through The First Celtic Wiccan Church (Escondido, California) and was bestowed the third degree initiation on July 26th, 2001 by Bill Eade. These can all be easily verified.

The false allegations regarding my initiation background appear to originate with Lark as I can find no earlier source for the unsubstantiated claims. Her most recent allegation appeared on a website called Wiccan Together. In a reply dated November 19, 2008 at 5:17pm, Lark writes:

"I will point out that Raven Grimassi's take on the history of Wicca is highly inaccurate. It's kind of funny that now he choses to write about Wicca. When I first met him back in the early 90's he lost no chance to denigrate Wiccans and claim he was Streggha. Then his claimed initiation into Streggha was proved false. Later his claim to a 3rd Degree in Wicca was likewise proved false. Let's see...twice proved a liar, and a poor historian. Not an author I have on my recommended list."

When confronted on the forum and asked for the evidence to support her unsubstantiated allegations, she fell silent and shortly afterwards deleted her post. I think that speaks volumes. Fortunately the website page was copied before it was deleted and it was added to my legal file as a libelous public accusation against my reputation and personal character as an author.

### 4. ALLEGATION: Grimassi never earned the right to be called a Strega.

FACT: My early training was by native Italians who are lineage bearers of Italian witchcraft. From this line I am descended from a witch named Calenda Tavani, who lived in the Naples area several generations ago. The Strega tradition is my birth right and is carried in my blood.

The unfounded attacks on my Italian witchcraft training appear to originate with Broch and Lark. The falsehoods are also perpetrated by members of the organization known as Stregoneria Italiana. None of these people have direct personal knowledge of me but make personal allegations despite the absence of any evidence.

To date, the origins of all of the unsubstantiated claims against my background of training in Italian witchcraft appear traceable to the following individuals in chronological order:

Broch and Lark (Blake and Carol Kirk)

Solitario (Kyle de Franco)

Rue (Grace Fahrur, aka Mary-Grace Roselli, aka Rue Roselli).

These individuals have actively posted misinformation about me and my writings on many website forums, various discussion groups, and a variety of chat rooms. Their unsubstantiated allegations have been regarded by some people as facts, and this misinformation has then been spread on the Internet like a cyber virus. This would make an interesting study for social anthropologists.

ALLEGATION: Grimassi claims that the Triad Clans (Tanarra, Janarra, Fanarra) dominate all of Italy.

FACT: Nowhere in any of my writings do I state such a thing. I simply state that these traditions reside in different regions of Italy.

ALLEGATION: In his books and writings Grimassi believes that anything associated with Italian folk magic is witchcraft.

FACT: In all of my writings I argue that there is a difference between folk magic and folk traditions versus witchcraft. While I believe that pagan magical systems are the foundational roots of contemporary Italian folk magic systems, I don't regard the modern traditions as pagan or witchcraft. Instead I view them as Catholic-based sorcery systems.

I believe that the old witchcraft and pagan traditions were arrogated by Christian culture in an intentional ethnocide against the pagan people and their beliefs and practices. Their ways were displaced, transformed, or eliminated as best suited the needs of Christian culture.

I believe that witchcraft is not folk magic. It is a pre-Christian system of archaic religion and magic. Its power base is pagan theology, not Catholicism.

- POSTED UPDATE 12/26/09



#### **ARTICLE REVIEW NUMBER ONE: *Spells, Saints, and Streghe: Witchcraft, Folk Magic, and Healing in Italy* by Sabina Magliocco.**

This is a review of the article titled *Spells, Saints, and Streghe: Witchcraft, Folk Magic, and Healing in Italy* by Sabina Magliocco. It first appeared in the Pomegranate magazine, issue 13, August 200. At the end of this review is a link to the entire article.

Magliocco's article is an interesting view of Italian folk magic systems along with material on related lore and cultural expressions. Unfortunately in my opinion the article is, at its core, a conflation of folk magic systems with Italian witchcraft, which can and has caused some confusion since its publication. I refer to the fact that some people misuse elements of her article in an attempt to discredit my own writings.

To begin this review I think it's important to make a few corrections related to Magliocco's views of me and my writings. Magliocco writes:

*"He [Grimassi] accepts at face value Leland's story of Aradia as Diana's daughter and messenger on earth, seeing her as a 14th century revivalist of la Vecchia Religione (the Old Religion)"*

This statement is actually contrary to everything I've written and taught about Aradia over the years. I do not view Aradia as the daughter of the goddess Diana, and in fact I refer to her in quite human terms. I do not view Aradia as a goddess at all. Instead I refer to her as the Holy Strega, and describe her as an avatar figure.

In another statement Magliocco writes:

*"Each [tradition] is led by a Grimas, or leader (for the record, there is no such word in the most comprehensive dictionary of the Italian language; the closest is the adjective grimo, "wrinkled, wizened" or "poor, wretched" [Zingarelli-Zanichelli, 1977:777])"*

As I've taught since before the publication of *Ways of the Strega*, the name "Grimas" is taken from the family name Grimassi, a family whose members (according to legend) held leadership roles in the early formation of the covens connected to the Aradia tradition. In the U.S. we use the shortened version - Grimas.

Magliocco comments further:

*"To be fair, Grimassi never claims to be reproducing exactly what was practiced by Italian immigrants to North America; he admits Italian-American Witches "have adapted a few Wiccan elements into their ways" (1995:xviii), and acknowledges that he has expanded upon the traditions he learned from his Italian mother in order to restore the tradition to its original state (Grimassi, pers. comm., 1996). But in attempting to restore an ancient tradition, Grimassi has in fact created a new one: a potpourri of folklore, revised history, and contemporary magical practice that bears little resemblance to anything that was ever practiced in Italy, before or after the Inquisition"*

I naturally disagree that I present "revised" history, and I argue that I present repressed history. While I strongly disagree that what I present bears little resemblance to practices in Italy, I will concede that the Wiccan material in my published works has apparently caused some confusion (and has led to the type of misunderstanding held by Magliocco and others). However, as I noted in my book, the tradition I'm writing about is a modern one, and therefore one should expect to see some differences.

I want to state from the beginning that I carry no ill will towards Sabina Magliocco. We have met and talked from time to time over the past several years. Magliocco and I have respectful disagreements about the interpretation of data related to folk magic and witchcraft. But there isn't any personal animosity on either side. Our meetings and conversations have always been very cordial.

I ask that the reader of this review keep in mind that my disagreements with the article are not intended to cast a negative light. However I do feel that some rebuttal is necessary because of how this article is misused by my critics. Therefore this review is designed to set the record straight, more than it is a critical review of the article itself. That being said, I will turn now to specific areas of the article.

Magliocco establishes her expertise on the subject of the article on stregoneria with the following:

*"My own interest in this topic stems from my personal background as well as my field experience. But although I grew up in Italy and the United States and maintain ongoing ties with Italy through frequent visits, I cannot make any claims to a family tradition of magical practice. Most of my knowledge of Italian folk magic comes from ethnographic research and fieldwork in Sardinia, an island off the western coast of Italy where I spent 18 months living in a highland community of sheep and goat pastoralists between 1986 and 1990 (Magliocco, 1993). I approach the study of folk magic from the perspective of my training in folklore and anthropology."*

Here Magliocco states that most of her knowledge of Italian folk magic comes from ethnographic research and fieldwork in Sardinia, where she spent a cumulative 18 months living in a highland community of sheep and goat pastoralists over a period spanning between 1986 and 1990. She also makes it clear that her knowledge is in the area of Italian folk magic. There is no claim by her to possess anything resembling an intimate knowledge of Italian witchcraft (as practiced in Italy or elsewhere). It seems likely that shepherds in Sardinia did possess some knowledge of folk magic as many Italian do. However, it seems reasonably certain that these commoners knew little if anything of authentic forms of witchcraft (because they aren't witches). Therefore they cannot seriously be viewed as expert witnesses on Italian witchcraft.

Magliocco comments on the influence of Charles G. Leland's *Aradia, or the Gospel of Witches*, and goes on to say that Leland's material does not bear a strong resemblance to Italian folk magical practice as documented in the ethnographic record of the last 100 years. She also claims this is true of modern Italian witchcraft traditions. Naturally there is little reason why Folk Magic and Witchcraft should correspond because they are two different

systems. As noted by 19th century folklorist Lady de Vere, the community of Italian witches possesses secret customs and traditions:

*"...the community of Italian witches is regulated by laws, traditions, and customs of the most secret kind, possessing special recipes for sorcery"* – La Rivista of Rome, June 1894

This separates witchcraft from the known material found in common and popular folk magic traditions. It also more than suggests that folk magic and witchcraft are two separate traditions.

Charles Leland mentions the following from his field studies among self-proclaimed witches (as opposed to common shepherds, as was the case with Magliocco's field studies):

*"The witches of Italy form a class who are the repositories of all the folklore; what is not at all generally known, they also keep as strict secrets an immense number of legends of their own, which have nothing in common with the nursery or popular tales, such as are commonly collected and published ... the more occult and singular of their secrets are naturally not of a nature to be published ...."* - Legends of Florence, 1895

In this light Magliocco's views are difficult to reconcile with those of professional Folklorists in the 19th century who performed field studies among people who defined themselves as witches. Magliocco comments that Italian-American Witchcraft or Stregheria traditions differ from Italian folk magical practice in several important ways. She first states that Italian folk magic is not an organized or unified religion, but a varied set of beliefs and practices. This is true, which is one of the primary reasons it differs from Italian witchcraft

Magliocco writes that while folk magic has deep historical roots, it is not a survival of an ancient religion, but an integral part of a rural peasant economy and way of life, highly syncretized with folk Catholicism. This is another reason why it differs from Italian witchcraft, which has pagan roots in pre-Christian times.

Magliocco continues with the view that knowledge of magical practices was at one time diffused throughout the rural population, rather than limited to a secret group of magical practitioners. Indeed such things were diffused, but they were diffused from the secret societies into the common population. However, the material was never understood by the non-initiated, and was quickly Christianized to conform to contemporary society. Within the "rural population" it quickly transformed into a diluted and altered form that today is known as folk magic.

Magliocco comments that the context of Italian folk magical practice differs considerably from that of contemporary Italian-American revival witchcraft, so that materials are not always easily transferable from one system to another. This is precisely one of the main reasons why they need to be understood as different systems. Their differences do not render either as unauthentic but speak to different systems that are not dependent upon one another.

In her article, Magliocco states that all traditions are perpetually in flux as their bearers constantly re-interpret and re-invent them with each individual performance. She further comments that revival and revitalization are part of the process of tradition, even when the result is different from the original practice itself. Ironically her argument is therefore as true of folk magic as it would be of Italian witchcraft. Consequently, since folk traditions transform within the model that Magliocco supports, they cannot be the measure of "authenticity" when comparing Italian witchcraft or other systems. This would be particularly true of anything that pre-dated the folk tradition, since the folk tradition itself has transformed into something different from its original roots.

Magliocco writes that one of the problems with the idea of a unified organization of Italian witches is that the Italian peninsula could not be said to have anything resembling an integrated culture between the end of the Roman Empire (453ce) and the beginning of the 20th century, making the existence of a secret, organized Italian witch cult nearly impossible. However, the reality is that five folklorists in Italy (during the 19th century) independently discovered a commonality within witchcraft traditions in different regions of Italy. Magliocco also comments that the development of a unified Italian system of ritual magic, diffused through oral tradition on a popular level, is unlikely before the 20th century. She goes on to add that any generalizations about an Italian folk culture need to be treated with great caution. The latter statement is very true, which is yet another reason why folk traditions and folk magic systems cannot be the universal measurements of authenticity in an investigation and comparison of Italian witchcraft.

All in all, I feel that Magliocco's article is very useful for people interested in the Catholic-rooted folk traditions of Italy. However, those readers interested in older and authentic forms of Italian witchcraft with pagan roots will need to find sources outside of this particular article.

[GO TO ARTICLE](#)**ARTICLE REVIEW NUMBER TWO: Stregoneria, by Marguerite Rigoglioso**

This is a review of the article titled *Stregoneria: The "Old Religion" in Italy from Historical to Modern Times*, by Marguerite Rigoglioso. At the end of my review is a link to the entire article.

This article is an interesting exploration of Italian folk magic and witchcraft, although it does include the common misunderstanding and conflation of the two subjects. Unlike most members of the academic community, Rigoglioso does not automatically discount the possibility of ancient roots and survival elements associated with the witchcraft of Italy. She appears to bring a balanced view into her consideration of the topic, which I find refreshing.

Rigoglioso states the much of the information in her article is based upon personal interviews with Lori Bruno, Bellezza Squillace, and a woman named "Fabrisia" (last name withheld). I happen to know all three women personally. While Rigoglioso did not interview me, nor did she have any correspondence with me, she refers to me in several places within the article. Since I am easy to contact through either my publisher or personal website, I am surprised that no effort was made to do so in connection with the topic explored in Rigoglioso's article.

Rigoglioso begins her article by questioning the authenticity of the word "stregheria" compared to the common usage of stregoneria. She writes:

*"I should note here that the word for witchcraft in the modern Italian language is 'stregoneria.' However, various writers, including Charles Leland and Raven Grimassi, refer to it as 'stregheria' (or even the misspelled 'stregeria'), claiming that this is the term historically used by its practitioners. As at this point in my research I have not yet confirmed whether witches in Italy have in fact ever called their craft 'stregheria,' I will use the term 'stregoneria.'"*

However, the word "stregheria" is used almost exclusively in *Apologia della Congresso Notturmo Delle Lamie*, by Girolamo Tartarotti (1751) and also appears as an entry in *Vocabolario piemontese-italiano del professore di gramatica italiana e latina* - by Michele Ponza (1860), and in *Vocabolario Bolognese Italiano* - by Carolina Coronedi Berti (1874), and in *Nouveau dictionnaire italien-francais et francais-italien* - by Costanzo Ferrari, Arthur Enkenkel (1900). In the latter book, both "stregheria" and "stregoneria" appear as separate entries with slightly different meanings; the entry on stregoneria refers strictly to sorcery, whereas the entry on stregheria refers to organized witchcraft in connection with the Sabbat. The word "stregheria" also appears in a modern Italian dictionary as a rare usage in place of the modern word "stregoneria" (*Vocabolario della Lingua Italiana*, edited by Nicola Zingarelli, 1970).

As noted earlier in my review, I was not contacted nor interviewed by Rigoglioso. I believe that had she taken the time to so do, the effort would have been beneficial to the research for her article in several areas.

I was surprised to find that Rigoglioso refers to the views in my published material as "purported," while at the same time she seemingly accepts at face value the statements of self-labeled "hereditary Italian Witches" interviewed for her article.

Rigoglioso writes:

*"In his several volumes, including the 1995 Ways of the Strega. Italian Witchcraft: Its Lore, Magick and Spells, Grimassi presents what he calls 'the Aridian Tradition, originally established in North America as a branch of Tanarra [the form of stregoneria he says was traditionally practiced in central Italy].' The remarkably systematized religion he presents, a purported blending of several northern and central Italian stregoneria practices, is, he notes, 'an attempt to restore the original Tradition.'"*

I find it odd that my clarification of what constitutes the tradition that I created is viewed as purported. Why not refer to it as a reported blending? The use of the term "purported" strikes me as a personal bias that has seeped into the article and caused an avoidable contamination.

In her article, Rigoglioso refers to a woman named "Fabrisia" as "a hereditary Italian-American Strega" without providing supporting evidence, but apparently accepting only Fabrisia's claim. Of personal interest to me is the fact that Fabrisia first presented herself to me several years ago as someone seeking to explore and possibly practice Italian Witchcraft. She was quite novice in this area as well as in the topic of witchcraft itself in general. However, a little over a year later she had a website with a bio wherein she claimed to have been raised as a hereditary in Italian Witchcraft. I guess somewhere along the line something must have jogged her memory and allowed her to suddenly remember her past.

Rigoglioso also refers to a woman named Bellezza Squillace, and again seems to accept her claim to hereditary lineage without supplying the reader with supporting evidence for accepting Squillace's claim. Rigoglioso goes to add:



*"Bellezza is no doubt one in a long line of priestesses of Persephone who have operated in Italy, Sicily, and beyond as sacred mediators between this world and the one beyond the veil."*

I think this would be difficult to prove, and yet Rigoglioso seems to accept this position (while referring to my "claims" as purported). I find this very curious.

My strongest objection to any statement in Rigoglioso's article is with the following:

*"Several of the streghe told me that Raven Grimassi's coven enacts the "Great Rite" during certain celebrations. That is, the high priest or high priestess has ritual sexual intercourse with another coven member in front of the entire coven."*

Even if such an allegation had any basis in fact, this would be something unknown to anyone not an initiate of my tradition. Non-initiates are not privileged to witnessing the rituals of my tradition. The people interviewed by Rigoglioso are not initiates of my tradition, and therefore have no personal knowledge of what does or does not take place in the rituals of my tradition. I think this was very poor judgment on the part of Rigoglioso to include such unsubstantiated claims.

Unfortunately, Rigoglioso does not limit her statements to hearsay, but goes on to write:

*"While Grimassi apparently claims that this ritual is a part of the original stregoneria tradition, my informants all tell me they were not taught that this was a part of the Vecchia Religione"*

Her statement that I "apparently claim" this, strikes me as an admission on her part that she's neither heard nor read of any such claim made directly by me. This makes sense because I certainly never published any material asserting that initiates of my tradition stand around in ritual circle watching the high priestess and high priest engaged in sexual intercourse. I am shocked that Rigoglioso includes such an unsupported statement in her article. Her article for the most part is a worthy academic exploration, but the inclusion of certain things that are better suited to the cheap tabloids takes away from what is otherwise a noteworthy article.

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### **Article Review number three: Who Was Aradia? The History and Development of a Legend, by Sabina Magliocco**

I have only a few disagreements with the material in this fine article. However, they are important differences of opinion, and I would like to respond.

Essentially this article is an exploration of the possible origins of the name and the legend of Aradia. The article covers folklore, witch trials, cultural views, and references to individuals associated with the legend of Aradia from the time of Leland through to modern times. One highlight of the article for me was Magliocco's consideration that the legend of Aradia may actually be connected to a living woman of the past. I'll come back to that later in the review.

My first disagreement is with the origins of the name Aradia being traceable to Herodias, a commonly despised character from the Old Testament. This is a complex mass of tangled elements, and this review is not the place to take the necessary time to resolve it now. I will write an article on this at a later time, so please check back. But for now I will comment that I disagree with Leland on the topic of Herodias and Aradia. I also disagree with Magliocco that the name Aradia may have its origins in the name Erodiade. What I was taught is that the name "Aradia" was once the secret name of a goddess, which was later used by the woman now attached to this legend. I believe that the Church and its agents intentionally created the link between Herodias and the goddess Diana, which later conveniently served as a bridge to include Aradia.

In her article, Magliocco poses the question whether some women, inspired by the legends of the Society of Diana, might have tried to replicate the sect in medieval Europe. While that may have happened, my view is that it was already previously established and was the reason why the idea existed in the first place. However, its depiction by the Church distorted the actual ways of the sect and eventually led to descriptions that placed it firmly in the realm of fantasy.

In a bone rarely tossed to me, Magliocco's article contains this interesting passage:

*"The existence of ostension in the connection to these legends could also mean that Grimassi's claim that Aradia was a real person may, in fact, not be entirely out of the question; a healer who was part of the society might have chosen to play the part, or even take on the name, of Erodiade."*

I agree that this may have been a possibility, and it is an interesting road to explore. This notion may have even played a part in northern Europe with the legends of Robin Hood, where perhaps real individuals kept the legend alive by taking on

the persona in some fashion. But that aside, I take the position that a real person is behind any legend, and he or she is the catalyst for the stories and ideas that evolve over the centuries. I don't believe that a legend develops out of thin air and then someone later impersonates the key figure. I think they impersonate a figure that pre-existed themselves.

Magliocco writes:

*"However, it is important to remember that even if a group decided to enact aspects of the legend of Diana/Herodias, it would not have been a revival of pre-Christian paganism, but an attempt to act out certain ritual aspects described in legends."*

It seems to me that "an attempt to act out certain ritual aspects described in legends" is not an act (in this context) to deepen one's faith in Christianity or endear one to the Church. After all, the theme is contrary to Christianity of the era. Therefore if the creation of a sect posing as the Society of Diana is not a revival of paganism, and not a Christian sect, then what else could it be? Is this just heresy for the sake of heresy, and did its members risk torture and death simply to enjoy or foster a pretense? This seems unlikely at best.

Magliocco goes on to suggest that the supernatural elements commonly associated with witchcraft (such as flying) may have been generated through imaginary visions and trances brought on through the use of herbal potions. In other words the people who "confessed" to such acts, believed themselves to have participated (and were unable to discern between reality and sheer fantasy). It is important to note, that for people who use drugs for a religious or magical purpose, their reality is that actually two worlds exist. One is the mundane world of mortal kind, and the other is the spirit realm. The two worlds go hand-in-hand, and it is the interplay between them that sustains both. To plow a field for planting, and to fly to a Sabbat for a celebration, is not a situation for a witch that calls into question the reality or importance of either event.

Near the end of Magliocco's article an interesting passage appears in her conclusions:

*"What can we conclude from this evidence about the legend of Aradia? The evidence I have examined and presented here suggests that the legend of Aradia has roots in archaic, pre-Christian materials concerning societies of healers who trafficked with spirits in order to cure. Healing may have involved trance-journeys as well as ecstatic dancing. These ancient materials combined with Classical legends of Diana and Hecate, and during the middle ages became attached to the New Testament story of Herodias, the eternal dancer."*

While careful not to refer to witches, the passage is still of value to survivalist views as it demonstrates how traditions can survive and be passed on in various guises.

Magliocco is quick to note that *"...the evidence does not support the idea that Aradia was an early teacher of the Craft, although some women may have called themselves Erodias during ostensive episodes."* This seems a fair enough view, to which I will add that perhaps one of these women was charismatic enough to have inspired and led a band of followers who embraced her teachings. If such a woman existed then perhaps she was the catalyst for the legend of Aradia.

Another point in the article that I think is important to address is the following:

*"There is no evidence of a widespread revival of pre-Christian religion as a result of the proliferation of this legend."*

I assume this is a reference to my tales of Aradia that relate how her followers traveled and spread the teachings. If so, it was not my intent to equate the establishment of several covens in various regions of Italy with a "widespread revival." I'm not even sure what constitutes a widespread revival. In any event I believe in the oral tales that covens were established over time and that their tradition survived in secrecy as the centuries passed.

Magliocco's passage may also refer to my mention of the writings of the Italian inquisitor Bernardo Rategno. In his work titled *Tractatus de Strigibus* (circa 1508), Rategno writes that a "rapid expansion" of the "witches sect" had begun approximately 150 years before his own time. He states that his conclusions were drawn from a study of old trial transcripts preserved by the Inquisition. Norman Cohn states that the chronology suggested by Rategno is not confirmed by other Italian documents. If so, this does not mean that Rategno was in error, it simply suggests that there is nothing outside of his view to prove his conclusions. A lack or absence of evidence is not proof of anything, it merely raises questions.

In Magliocco's closing, she comments:

*"Folklore, of course, seldom dies; it transform itself according to new paradigms and cultural discourses. So it is not surprising to read new versions of this legend emerging today. Grimassi's expansion of Leland's material must be understood in exactly such a context, as the continuation of the legend begun so long ago."*

Here I will agree that the story of Aradia is a living tradition, and the versions in which it is retold are all part of the evolution of the expanding spiritual understanding. The legend of Aradia was never intended to be a "gospel" in the same regard as the Christian legends about Jesus that comprise the New Testament. In other words, the Aradia story is not entirely fixed and constrained, nor is it designed to be taken literally word for word. It is instead *the voice of the wind* carrying the essence of Aradia's teachings to future generations.

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#### ARTICLE: WIKIPEDIA - ARADIA, GOSPEL OF THE WITCHES

The Gospel of Aradia, by Charles Godfrey Leland is, perhaps, one of the most controversial writings on witchcraft. There are many opinions regarding Leland's writings, and the Aradia material in particular. Some of these opinions come from people that have actually taken the time to do the reading themselves.

There are many misunderstandings regarding the Aradia material, and it is indeed a difficult text to unravel. I do like to take the time whenever possible to attempt a correction or an alternative view. So in that light I want to address one particular commentary.

In the online encyclopedia known as Wikipedia, an entry appears within an article on the Gospel of Aradia, by Charles Leland, stating:

*"The reception of "Aradia" amongst Neopagans has not been entirely positive. Clifton suggests that modern claims of revealing an Italian pagan witchcraft tradition, for example those of Leo Martello, and Raven Grimassi of Stregheria, must be 'matched against', and compared with the claims in Aradia".*

I find it a curious statement that a match "must" be in order, especially considering the fact that within the academic community the Aradia material is a disputed text. So naturally (regarding Leland's Aradia material) matches and comparisons for authenticity as envisioned by Chas Clifton would require that the Aradia material be genuine throughout the text. To date there is no proof that it meets such a standard. Without proof that the Aradia material is authentic and representative of Italian witchcraft it cannot be the measure of authenticity. Therefore it cannot effectively be used to discredit other writings or views on Italian witchcraft, nor is it a representative ethnographic foundation against which other writings or views "must" be compared. The Aradia material is, unfortunately, a disputed text with problems of its own when compared to the usually accepted folklore, folk traditions, and folk magic practices of Italy.

Another entry on Wikipedia's Aradia article reads:

*"Clifton further suggests that a lack of comfort with Aradia may be due to an "insecurity" within Neopaganism about the movement's claim to authenticity as a religious revival. Valiente offers another explanation; that the identification of Lucifer as the God of the witches in Aradia was "too strong meat" for Wiccans who were used to the gentler, romantic Paganism of Gerald Gardner and were especially quick to reject any relationship between witchcraft and Satanism".*

This passage appears to be another questionable view expressed within the Wikipedia article. While some neo-pagans may be uncomfortable with Leland's Aradia material, the reasons need not stem from insecurity. One of the major objections to the Aradia text is the inclusion of negative stereotypes related to witches and witchcraft. This is regarded as an insult by many neo-pagans (as opposed to a feeling of insecurity). Because most neo-pagans reject Leland's Aradia material as an accurate depiction of religious witchcraft, its consideration in the context that Clifton suggests, appears to be without merit. However, the kernel of truth within the Aradia material is the tale of the continuation and survival of the witches' sect, and of this no true believer is in doubt or insecure. Its appearance within a Christianized distortion (Leland's Aradia) is an unfortunate preservation of the survival of religious witchcraft (fragmented and disjointed as it is in Leland's telling). But there it seems to reside nevertheless.

Wikipedia has become an interesting element related to the Internet, and is sometimes misused as a tool for criticism and for fostering personal agenda, as opposed to its actual noble purpose and function. As recently as March 2008, a flurry of deleted entries and aggressive edits of the Aradia article have erupted. The question has since arisen regarding what's going on with the edits of this article. It's been suggested there's an edit war being waged around text pertaining to mention of my name and my position on various matters..

Perhaps I can help clear up some things, and put to rest some allegations/suspicions. One of them is that Rasenna is my use of a sock puppet. Actually, Rasenna is one of my research assistants on staff at the College of the Crossroads. From time to time students and staff of the College do frequent Wikipedia and various forums in their spare time. I neither encourage nor discourage the use of our computers for such personal time activities.

Second, to the best of my recollection, I've never personally posted to any article on Wikipedia. I have, however, from time to time been alerted to various mentions of my name on this encyclopedia. My staff suggested that I post a response on my website to the matter of the Aradia article, since the edits appeared to be suppressive of information intended to expand the article. After looking over the edits, I agreed that some action was warranted.

On the general matter of my name appearing in Wikipedia articles, in the beginning the entries were very negative and erroneous, and attempts by various people to dispute these were vigorously countered by a few editors and one administrator. I never addressed them personally, as I believe that people should be allowed their own views. Unfortunately this outlook is not something reciprocated by the aforementioned individuals.

Due to the constructive efforts of several individuals who believe that the best opinions are informed opinions, truthful and supporting text has remained in place within the articles that mention my name (despite aggressive ongoing deletions). It's a sad commentary that such efforts are necessary, and especially in a format like Wikipedia, which is intended to be an accurate and unbiased resource for the community.

It is unfortunate that the mention of my name, and statements related to my position within relevant articles, is a point of contention. One administrator commented that he saw no need for mention of my name or reference to my work (even though the article pertained to topics that I frequently write about in my published work, and inclusion was relevant to the existing text within the Wikipedia article). This is a sad state of affairs, and in my opinion it's a misuse of power and a violation of the encyclopedia's intent.

Many people feel that personal bias and agenda has no place in Wikipedia articles. Although this goes both ways, I do note that the people who include my name and references to my work, without implied criticism of me or my positions, are not the ones who delete contrary entries. Deletion seems to be the exclusive providence of those who have a problem with me or my positions. Statements of implied criticism appear to be allowed in the Wikipedia articles that include my name. But anyone who tries to balance them with additional information seems to be held to a greater standard and is called to a stricter adherence of the rules. I believe this situation is quite telling, and if someone wants to understand what's going on with the edits, I feel they need look no further than the core causation (which I have addressed here).

In closing, I regret that mention of my name and my position has caused such a flurry of contested edits. I have no wish to see any Wikipedia article subjected to disruption of any kind.



## **PUBLIC NOTICE: January 10, 2008**

### **INTELLECTUAL THEFT & COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT**

I'm writing today about the theft of an author's work by another person who passes it off as his or her own book. This is known as intellectual theft, and is illegal under copyright law. I want to write about this because I recently became the victim of plagiarism.

In December of 2007 I was alerted to the publication of a book titled *The Complete Book of the Holy Strega*. Word came to me that this book is a compilation of my writings compiled by a woman presenting them as her own. She calls herself Aradia della Toscana, and also uses the alias Lady Strega, and Aradia de Toscana. The book was offered for sale through Lulu.com but has been removed from that website along with "Lady Strega's" store front.

Through a series of events I was sent a copy of this book, *The Complete Book of the Holy Strega*. I quickly discovered that the material is my own, word-for word, verbatim (but my name is never mentioned). The fact is that the material in the above mentioned book, *The Complete Book of the Holy Strega*, all came from a book I wrote in 1980 and had published by Nemi Enterprises in 1981, which was titled *The Book of the Holy Strega*. It should be noted that the person who stole my work did add Italian translations to my previously published book (which contained only English). However, the added Italian translation appears to have been done through a translation program, and is very poor and inaccurate. This is clear because tense, gender assignment, and sentence structure are frequently incorrect in this book, *The Complete Book of the Holy Strega*, which often happens when relying on a translation program.

But for Aradia della Toscana (Lady Strega) the errors in translation present a much larger problem. This is because she claims that the Italian text is her grandmother's writings as passed down in her family tradition from Italy. If so then this would mean that her grandmother did not possess the necessary command of Italian (and yet is described as a native who was raised in Italy). Another problem in *The Complete Book of the Holy Strega* is the English text itself. In my book I wrote in the Introduction that my text is a paraphrase of oral and written Italian material. In other words, the English is my personal creation. And yet, Aradia della Toscana presents the exact wordage from my book as the translation of her grandmother's material (which she states is hundreds of years old). How she thought she would get away with this deception is puzzling.

One might assume that this person lacks intelligence, but she actually appears to be clever and put some thought into how to craft a deception. For example, she put a copyright notice dated 1977 in her book, *The Complete Book of the Holy Strega*. My copyright is 1981, and I assume that when caught as a plagiarist her plan was to claim that I stole *her* book. There are a couple of problems here for her. One is that she would not be able to produce an official copyright in court but I can.

Another problem is that she included several drawings in her so-called 1977 copy that were actually drawn four years later by one of my initiates. The copy of her book (The Complete Book of the Holy Strega) that I now own states that it is a copy of the second printing, 1977. But of course that is impossible. One of the images used in this copy is an old Italian illustration from a fairytale book that I reworked in Adobe Photoshop in 2007 and placed on the Stregheria.com website early last year. Clearly this image was captured by Aradia della Toscana from the website sometime in 2007, and yet appears in the so-called 1977 printing of her book The Complete Book of the Holy Strega. Well, on second thought maybe we should question this person's intelligence afterall.

In the end the question of the day becomes why did this person steal my work and present it as her own? I can't answer that for her, but I do wonder how she reconciles the spiritual nature of the teachings in the book with her behavior of intellectual theft and plagiarism (not to mention perpetrating a lie).

I believe that a person should obtain the results of his or her labor. In this light, Aradia della Toscana (aka Lady Strega, and Aradia de Toscana) should receive what she has worked very hard for, and that is to be exposed for what she did. It is my hope that what I have written here will help accomplish such justice.

Anyone with information on this person's legal name, email address, or physical address, please contact me at: [grimassi@earthlink.net](mailto:grimassi@earthlink.net)